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ABSTRACT

Presented in this welcoming address to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights were (1) the functions of the Commission's State Advisory Committees; and (2) the purpose of the hearing investigating problems of American Indians in New Mexico. Lower educational attainment, life expectancy, and low income levels were some problems that were examined. (FF)

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WELCOMING REMARKS OF EDWARD YUDIN,
VICE CHAIRMAN, NEW MEXICO COMMITTEE
TO THE U. S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

At Hearings on Indian Problems Held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, 14-15 November 1972

It is my pleasure as the Vice Chairman of the New Mexico State Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights to welcome to Albuquerque and to New Mexico two of our U. S. Commissioners, Dr. Rankin and Chancellor Mitchell.

Since the establishment of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1957, this is the first hearing held by the Commission in New Mexico, and this is also the first hearing held by the Commission exclusively on the question of Indian rights.

The State Advisory Committee is established by the Commission on Civil Rights pursuant to the Civil Rights Act of 1957, and as amended by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Chairman of the State Advisory Committee is the Honorable Sterling Black. His predecessor was Justice Samuel Montoya. The Committee is made up of all ethnic groups and represents all of the cultures in New Mexico. The members range from Taos to Las Cruces.

It is the function of our State Advisory Committee to advise the Commission of any knowledge or information

RC007142

it has of any alleged deprivation in voting rights, of constitutional violations, of equal protection of the laws, to assist the Commission in matters in which the Commission shall request assistance, and to generally act as a fact-finder for the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Over the years the State Advisory Committee has held hearings in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Clovis and Roswell. We have covered such subjects as discrimination in employment, housing, administration of justice, discrimination in private and public institutions, and discrimination in the field of education. We have assisted the Commission in gathering information relating to all of its subjects and in the publication of reports covering those subjects.

Our members have attended meetings in Dallas and Washington, D. C. We have referred specific matters involving discrimination to the Justice Department, and to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Our members have aided in the research of the Indian question leading up to this hearing today.

The members of the State Advisory Committee are proud to serve not only the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, but to serve all of the people in the State of New Mexico, and

we hope in some small measure to contribute to the betterment of our State.

The meetings today and tomorrow will revolve around a few of the many problems facing the Indian population in New Mexico. We have in New Mexico approximately 73,000 American Indians as of the 1970 census, which is approximately 7 percent of our State's total population. Over 50 percent of the Indian population in New Mexico is concentrated in two counties, McKinley and San Juan. Statistically, a very small percentage of the total Indian population live in urban areas, and these areas are Albuquerque, Farmington, Gallup and Hobbs. The latest figures indicate that about 77,000 Indians live on or near reservations in New Mexico. I believe some of the important statistics concerning Indians are that the birth rate among the Indians is 38.5 live births for each 1,000 Indians. This rate is two times as high as the total population rate. That although American Indians have one of the highest birth rate of any minority group, life expectancy at birth for Indians was below that of the United States as a whole. In 1970 life expectancy for American Indians was 64 years

as compared to 70 years for the general population. Educational figures indicate that there is a lower level of completion for American Indians than for Anglos, Spanish Americans, Asian Americans or Blacks.

Not only does the American Indian in New Mexico tend to have lower educational attainment levels than other population groups, but the average performance levels of Indian children attending public schools are often 2 to 3 years below those of white children. The dropout rate for Indian students enrolled in the State public schools is very high compared to other population groups. For Indian pupils attending grades 9 through 12 in New Mexico, the dropout rate was almost 34 percent.

Indian children in New Mexico, like other minority groups, face special problems that tend to complicate their educational experience. In many instances they must encounter new concepts, values and attitudes when they enter school. Many Indian children must learn English as a second language.

According to the 1960 census, more than 3 out of 5 rural Indian families received less than $3,000 in yearly

income. Family income below the $1,000 level was 3 times as prevalent among the rural Indian population as among the total population.

Indians living on reservations in the State recorded even lower median family incomes. For example, Indian families living on the Acoma reservation recorded a median income of $2,500. Indians living on the Taos reservation reported a median income of approximately $1,900.

Indians in New Mexico generally live in worse housing than any other racial or ethnic group. Low income levels, as well as families of a large size, accentuate the problem. Housing data compiled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs indicates the poor and often deplorable housing conditions in which Indians live. Of 6,000 housing units located on various reservations, over 50 percent were reported to be in substandard condition. Approximately 17 percent of the substandard homes need to be replaced, and the balance need extensive renovation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has estimated that 2,337 Indian families living on reservations need new housing.

In 1970, according to a special tabulation by the Bureau of the Census, median family income for all population groups

in New Mexico was reported to $7,849. For the American Indians, a special tabulation estimated the sum of $4,500.

The health status of American Indians in the State of New Mexico is inferior to that of other population groups. As previously stated, birth rates for Indians are over 2 times higher than for the general United States population. In addition, while the percentage of Indian live births which occur in hospitals has increased substantially in the last 15 years. The number of hospital births for Indian families is still significantly lower than for the total population.

The infant death rate among Indians has declined considerably between 1955 and 1967. However, when compared to the general population, it is still generally high.

The Indian Health Service reported that 14 percent of all the Indian deaths occurring in 1967 were infant deaths.

In recent years, over half of all Indian deaths have been attributed to five causes: accidents, diseases of the heart, malignant tumors, influenza and pneumonia. A significant statistic is that for Indians living in New Mexico, the suicide rate exceeds that of the national average. In fact, the Indian Health Service reports that suicide

rates among the Indians are 2 times as high as the total United States rate.

The homicide rate among Indians is reported to be 3.3 times as high as the total United States rate. In New Mexico in 1967, homicides accounted for 1.8 percent of all the deaths among Indians. The national rate was only .6 percent in 1967.

Deaths from alcohol are 6.5 times as high among Indians as in the general population. In 1967, the Indian Health Service reported that cirrhosis of the liver accounted for 2.2 percent of all deaths. National average was 1.4 percent.

American Indians in New Mexico live in a state of economic underdevelopment and deprivation. More than any other minority group, they suffer from high unemployment rates and very low wages. On many reservations, nearly 50 percent of the Indian labor force is either unemployed or underemployed. Indians are usually extended preference when reservation jobs are available, however considering this situation, the rate of unemployment on most of the reservations in New Mexico is serious. Statistically, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has estimated that approximately 38 percent of the labor force are unemployed in contrast to the unemployment rate of 5.4 percent for New Mexico in 1971.

On behalf of the State Advisory Committee, I hope that these hearings will be of great benefit to the Indians of our State and country.